

CHAPTER XIII

AFTER LIFE

It would be a pleasant labor, and one well worth the pains, to record the story of the later years of every one of those valiant souls, from the highest to the lowest. But that may not be done here. The best homage that can be rendered to the subordinates is to speak of their common motive: simple-hearted, unselfish devotion to the interests of the nation, unstained by ulterior hope of private gain. A bill was passed by Congress in 1807, granting to the non-commissioned officers and privates, according to rank, a sum of money equal to double pay for the period of service, and, in addition, 300 acres of land from the public domain. But nothing beyond ordinary pay had been definitely pledged in advance. Clearly it was not the expectation of material reward which sustained them.

The bill passed by Congress included also a grant of 1500 acres of land to Captain Lewis, and of 1000 acres to Captain Clark. It is upon record that Lewis, in the spirit which had regulated all of his relations with Clark, objected to this discrimination in his favor.

In March, 1804, before the expedition set out, the newly acquired Louisiana Territory was divided by Congress, the dividing line being the 33d parallel. The southern portion was named the District of New Orleans, and the northern, the District of Louisiana; this name being changed, a year later, to Louisiana Territory.

On March 3d, 1807, Meriwether Lewis was made governor of this territory, with headquarters at the village of St. Louis; and this office he held until he died, October 11, 1809, at the age of thirty-five years.

Although his service in this position was so untimely short, he did much toward laying a firm foundation for the institutions of lawful and orderly life. According to Mr. Jefferson, "he found the territory distracted

by feuds and contentions among the officers of the government, and the people themselves divided by these into factions and parties. He determined at once to take no side with either, but to use every endeavor to conciliate and harmonize them. The even-handed justice he administered to all soon established a respect for his person and authority, and perseverance and time wore down animosities, and reunited the citizens again into one family."

In the newly organized society, events rapidly took form. Governor Lewis, with two others (judges of the court), constituted the territorial legislature, which concerned itself at once with matters of development, — providing for the establishment of towns, laying out roads, etc. In 1808 the laws of Louisiana Territory were collected and published, under the supervision of the legislature. This was the first book printed in St. Louis. A post-office was established also in 1808, and soon afterward the first newspaper appeared. From a mere frontier trading settlement, whose conduct was regu-

lated by untamed impulses, St. Louis was being put in the way of its present greatness.

Aside from these purely administrative duties, the governor was further occupied in endeavoring to secure permanent peace with the Indians, and to prepare them for receiving the advantages of civilized life. This was his largest thought, growing naturally out of all that he had seen and done in the years preceding; and in it he was supported and inspired by continued association with Captain Clark, who had been appointed Indian agent for the territory. He had plenty to do; and in such intervals as could be found, he was preparing for publication the history of his travels.

The manner of his death is not exactly known. Although several writers have given their best efforts to erasing what they seem to consider a blot upon his reputation, the weight of opinion appears to sustain Mr. Jefferson's statement that he committed suicide while affected by hypochondria. Mr. Jefferson wrote in his memoir: —

“Governor Lewis had from early life been subject to hypochondriac affections. It was a constitutional disposition in all the nearer branches of the family of his name, and was more immediately inherited by him from his father. They had not, however, been so strong as to give uneasiness to his family. While he lived with me in Washington I observed at times sensible depressions of mind; but, knowing their constitutional source, I estimated their course by what I had seen in the family. During his Western expedition, the constant exertion which that required of all the faculties of body and mind suspended these distressing affections; but after his establishment at St. Louis in sedentary occupations, they returned to him with redoubled vigor and began seriously to alarm his friends. He was in a paroxysm of one of these when his affairs rendered it necessary for him to go to Washington.”

He proceeded upon this journey, and was crossing through Tennessee when death overtook him, at the cabin of a backwoodsman where he had stopped for the night. Some

of the circumstances point to murder, others to suicide; the truth is conjectural. What does it matter, after all? He had lived largely; had done a man's work; he has a noble place in history.

A better fortune was in store for Captain Clark. He was destined for long and honorable service in public life, and a fair old age.

On the 12th of March, 1807, a few days following Captain Lewis's appointment as governor of Louisiana Territory, Captain Clark was commissioned by President Jefferson as brigadier-general of the territorial militia, and as Indian agent. Dr. Coles says in his excellent biographical sketch that "in those days this title was not synonymous with 'thief,' and the position was one of honor, not to be sought or used for dishonest purposes." Then William Clark was the man for the place. Throughout his public life there is no stain of any sort upon his name. With his strong, decisive, straightforward character, which would not suffer him to yield a jot in his ideas of right and

wrong, he must have excited jealousies and made some enemies; but none of these had the hardihood to speak against his integrity.

His best work was accomplished as Indian agent. In that position he was in fact and in name the foster-father of all the tribes who lived in the territory he had helped to explore. It devolved upon him to acquaint the Indians with the nature and purposes of our government, and to bring them into obedience to its laws. More than this, he had a large task before him in endeavoring to reconcile the traditional enmities of the tribes one against another. He succeeded well. He got the confidence of the natives, and kept it; from fearing his power, most of them came to revere the man. When all is said of the Indians,—of their savage craft, their obliquity of moral vision, their unsparing cruelty, and their utter remissness in most matters of behavior, the fact remains that they know how to appreciate candor and honor, and will respond to it as well as they are able. They are slow to believe in wordy protestations: they must have signs

more tangible. They will not trust all men of white complexion merely because they have found one trustworthy; each man must prove himself and stand for himself. William Clark gave them a rare exhibition of upright, downright manliness, and they learned to respect and love him. He was soon celebrated from St. Louis to the Pacific, and was called by the name "Red-Head." To this day, old men of the Rocky Mountain tribes speak of him with fondness, saying that our government has never shown another like him.

He was a man of iron; his was an iron rule. In that time, Indian affairs were comparatively free from the modern bureaucratic control; the agent devised and followed his own plans, unhampered by jealous superiors. It has been said that Clark's office was that of an autocrat, a condition too dangerous to be generally tolerated. Clark was indeed an exception. The most absolute power could be intrusted to him with implicit confidence that it would not be abused. The Indians themselves, who were the most di-

rectly concerned, did not rebel against his unbending authority. If he was stern, exacting the utmost, and holding them to a strict accountability for violations of law, they knew that his least word of promise was certain of fulfillment. They did not find his rule too onerous under those conditions. While he held sway, the Western Indian country was in an unequaled state of order and decency.

Not the least of our debts to Captain Clark lies in the fact that it was he who brought the journals of the great expedition to public view. Captain Lewis had not been able to finish this work before his death; most of the details of arrangement for publication fell to his surviving companion, with the admirable editorial supervision of Nicholas Biddle. It is often regretted that editorial revision of the manuscripts was considered necessary; for what was thus gained sometimes in clearness and brevity of statement was more than lost in delicious naïveté. Mr. Biddle did his part thoroughly, sympathetically; and it was he who succeeded in

finding a publisher, — a matter hard to accomplish in that time, troubled as it was with war and with political and commercial uncertainty. The authentic history did not appear until the year 1814.

Meanwhile, Captain Clark had passed to fresh honors. Following the death of Governor Lewis, Benjamin Howard was appointed as his successor. In 1812 the name of the territory was changed to Missouri; and in 1813 Captain Clark was appointed by President Madison as its governor. After being reappointed by Madison in 1816 and 1817, and by Monroe in 1820, he surrendered his office upon the admission of Missouri to statehood, when a governor was elected by vote of the people. In 1822 he was named by President Monroe to be Superintendent of Indian Affairs, and this post he held for sixteen years thereafter, until his death.

He died as a man of his make would wish to die. He was sixty-eight years of age, but still in harness and able to do his work. He passed quietly away at the home of his eldest

son, Meriwether Lewis Clark, in St. Louis, on the first day of September, 1838.

And they took of the fruit of the land in their hands, and brought it down unto us, and brought us word again, and said, It is a good land which the Lord our God doth give us.

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